

St. Paul Resident Remains in Rwandan Prison

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Washington, DC - On Tuesday, June 8, 2010, Congresswoman Betty McCollum (MN-04) and Congressman Keith Ellison (MN-05) introduced legislation in the U.S. House of Representatives, H.Res.1426, requesting that the Rwandan government release Peter Erlinder from prison so he may immediately return to the United States. Congresswoman McCollum believes his release is important to ongoing positive U.S.-Rwandan relations.

The legislation has been referred to the U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs.

"This legislation is meant to send a signal to the Rwandan government that the immediate release of Professor Erlinder can prevent this unfortunate incident from escalating into an impasse in relations between our two countries," said Congresswoman McCollum. "My staff and I have made multiple attempts to reach the Rwandan Ambassador with no response yet. Now I will be reaching out to my Congressional colleagues to urge them to send a signal to Rwanda to immediately release Professor Erlinder."

"Professor Erlinder is being held without access to his family and I have serious concerns regarding his basic rights as an American citizen held in Rwanda," said Congressman Ellison. "This resolution calls for Professor Erlinder to be released immediately on humanitarian grounds."

A resident of St. Paul, Minnesota, Professor Erlinder is a human rights attorney and instructor at the William Mitchell College of Law. Last month, he was arrested in Rwanda on charges of denying the 1994 genocide. Initially, he traveled to the country to defend presidential candidate Victoire Ingabire, who was also arrested on suspicion of genocide denial. Professor Erlinder pleaded not guilty, but the court denied him bail.

Since Professor Erlinder's arrest, Congresswoman McCollum and her staff have been working with the State Department, the Rwandan Embassy in Washington, DC, and the U.S. Embassy in Rwanda to ensure Professor Erlinder's safety and eventual release.

Congresswoman Betty McCollum serves on the House Appropriations and Budget Committees.

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